

PFLAG/T Edmonton

May/June 1998

PFLAG-T

We are Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians, Bisexuals, Gays and Transgenders.

Our primary objectives are

- to offer mutual support to each other wherever needed;
- to invite others to share knowledge, to be free from fear, and to reach out, search and discover more about these family members and friends.

SUPPORT MEETINGS

Tues, May 19, 1998

&

Tues, June 16, 1998

7:30 pm

Everyone Welcome



THE POWER OF PARENTS' LOVE

"I can't throw away what God has given us. I wouldn't dare!" said Delwin's mother looking back on the time

Delwin "came out" to his mother. "When confronted with a gay son parents must choose - either to shun or to accept and learn. Not to judge. Being Christian is to **not** be judgmental. The Bible says to "Love your neighbour as yourself." This (can lead to) complete fear because then you have to have all the answers.

Delwin gave us several books, including *Now That You Know* and *The Homosexual: My Neighbor*, that helped a lot; also interacting with other parents and other gays (helped a lot).

Before Delwin came out we knew he felt troubled about something. Now he is a much happier person. His Dad has been supportive from day one. He instilled (the values of social) justice in all his children.

Looking back, it was never a negative struggle but a learning thing. The only struggle was (dealing) with the bigotry. We definitely

appreciate all the support from the community. We couldn't have done (it) without the support from the community.

After the (Supreme) Court decision (that Alberta Human Rights Law must include protection from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation) the hatred of "Christians and church people" (expressed through the media) was unreal. The positive editorials and letters in *The Edmonton Journal* were heartening. - they put things in perspective. We were scared of the hate.

We believe (discrimination/hatred) is not at an end. There will be many more fights, e.g. to be foster parents, for spousal rights and to legally marry. We must call them to truthfulness (commitment to marriage) so that they have the same marriage responsibilities and privileges (as married heterosexuals). **There is a lot of education work to be done yet."**

...

Some reactions in *The Edmonton Journal* to the new legislation include:

- We Welcome Gay Teachers In the Bible I grew up with, Jesus loved everybody. In "Our Alberta", if we can't love gays and

lesbians, why can't we at least respect them?

The Supreme Court has rightly enforced the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. On to other questions:

Should homosexuals teach our children? Please do, and instill in our young ones the open-mindedness that often comes from being an oppressed person marginalized by the non-love of others.

Human rights include work rights; let the workers' ability dictate their right to a job.

Joanne & Bob Cambell

- "I feel a lot better, and not just because my landlord can't evict me. I've been reading the court's decision, and it's a real psychological validation. I do have rights. I am a person, and the province (has been) wrong."

gay man

- "It's a huge struggle to get the laws of the province to apply to us in the way that they apply to you guys (heterosexuals). When it first hit me was when I was leaving the rally at the legislature on Thursday. I got to the end of the reflecting pool and I turned around and looked back at the (legislative building, and suddenly it

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looked different to me. It was a place, all of a sudden, that I was part of, that didn't require me to pretend to be someone I wasn't."

lesbian lawyer

- Nothing 'Normal' About Feelings of Bigotry

Following the Supreme Court's decision, *The Edmonton Journal* and *The Edmonton Sun* carried stories about the court's decision and photos of Delwin Vriend and his partner holding hands and kissing at a public rally. A few days later my husband and I discussed the issue. **Both of us were happy with the Supreme Court's decision, yet both of us shamefully confessed to one another we felt a twinge of discomfort with the photo of Vriend and his partner kissing.** Interesting reaction from two individuals who pride themselves on being liberal-minded.

I thought about our shameful confession and it struck me that if my liberal-minded husband and I felt uncomfortable, how the photos must have struck people who are less liberal-minded. Their discomfort must have been very high. **Discomfort breeds fear and fear breeds hate.**

But why the discomfort? It is because it is not what we normally see. And, **let us not confuse what we normally see as being normal and right, and what we do not see as often as being abnormal and wrong.**

Normalcy is a social construct, something we fabricate to be real At one time in our “civilized” history it was considered “normal” to consider women as non-persons with no rights to vote, own property or even have rightful claim to their own children. **So, what is normal? Nothing. Normal is a construct of your mind, and that is changeable.**

It seems to me that the majority is prepared to accept homosexuality to a certain degree as long as they do not have to see it. And, of course, that begs the question of whether that is acceptance at all. My resolve is to keep looking within myself and question my feelings of discomfort, bigotry or prejudice that I have.

Joan Currie, Edm.

**A Call for Dialogue:
Gay and Lesbian Christians
and the Ministry of the
(Lutheran) Church**

(An excerpt from Part Two)

To clarify our argument for the full acceptance of all people, regardless of sexual and affectional orientation, and to provide for an arena of discussion with our churches, we present the following theses:

I. Human sexuality, without distinction based on sexual orientation, is a gift of God, not only for procreation, but also for learning and expressing love and affection.

Sexuality exists, of course, for the biological continuation of the species. But in the human family God has fused this gift with the unique vocation to and capacity for mutual love. The capacity to love - the impulse to reach out beyond ourselves toward others - has its grounding in our sexuality. Indeed, it is only as mutuality of love is attained that the gift of children, who need a nurturing and affectionate environment in which to grow, comes to its intended fruition.

Mutuality of love is central to human sexuality, apart from procreation, and contributes to the fullness of God-given personality. For this reason, **the church supports heterosexual relationships in which procreation is not expected - couples who**

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choose not to have children; marriage among the elderly, the infertile or the physically challenged.

Human sexuality is the good gift in which our ability to love finds its home. Human love is never disembodied. Human beings incarnate love in touching and embracing, in exchanging the wisdom of the mind and the laughter of the heart, in making love, and in sharing one another’s tears and sufferings. We affirm the right and vocation of all people, as a matter of justice, to give and receive love and affection.

II. Human sexuality manifest itself in a variety of gender orientations, from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual.

... The journey of self-discovery that leads a person to say that he or she is gay or lesbian or bisexual in orientation is most often lonely and fearful. Sexual orientation lies deep within the human personality. We affirm the right of all people, as a matter of justice, to engage in honest self-discovery in the matter of sexual orientation.

III. All sexual orientations are gifts of God, and are to be honored as such.

As John Boswell has shown in his definitive study of homosexuality and

Christianity, there have been major periods in history of the church, prior to the twelfth century, when there was considerable acceptance of same-gender love in the Christian community.

The contemporary (Christian) church is the heir of a heterosexual bias which gained ascendancy in the general rise of social intolerance in the thirteenth century. This bias became articulated in late medieval traditions of "natural law," and later, in the reformation concepts of the "orders of creation." This bias is echoed in all the current Lutheran statements on human sexuality.

This is clearly the arena in which we challenge the (Christian) church to seek fresh theological insight. The variety of human sexual orientations is a given reality. On the basis of empirical evidence, it is to be seen as a part of the created order. **It is natural...**

IV. Love is the criterion by which our sexuality is judged, not vice versa.

V. While sexual orientation may be distinguished from sexual expression, we reject the argument that would divide the two in order to

condone the one while condemning the other.

... We affirm the right of all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, to live a life of wholeness and intimacy, the enjoyment of relationships of love and companionship, and the sexual expression of their personhood. It is illegitimate to attempt to sever sexual orientation from sexual behavior. To do so is to sever the person.

Alberta's (Canada's ?) First Spirituality-Sexuality Conference

The idea for this conference was born on April 23, 1997 around a potluck supper at Garneau United Church (Edmonton) arranged by Evelyn and Reverend Bert Frey. Evelyn and Bert have four heterosexual sons but are active members of Affirm United, a United Church organization dedicated to the support and pastoral care of gay, lesbian and bisexual people, their families and friends.

The first idea was a weekend event that would bring together the Edmonton members of this group, but it soon became apparent that involving other Christian communities would be more

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effective and would attract a wider audience.

Further meetings were attended by over 25 people representing Baptist, Lutheran, Anglican, Mennonite, United Church, Metropolitan Community Church, Lambda, and First Nation communities, along with representatives from PFLAG/T. All agreed there is a deeply felt need to share their faith experiences with a wider community.

The Conference explored lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender realities in a faith context. Held in Grant MacEwan Community College the nineteen sessions included:

- *Parents Out First: A positive coming out experience is a two-step process: first the parents offer openness, honesty, willingness to accept "the abnormal"; second, the child learns to embrace his/her sexuality.* Blanche & Lawrence, Lynne and daughter.
- *Where's the Sin? The possibility or impossibility of reconciling scripture with gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender lifestyles & norms - is this necessary? What about the sins of homophobia and heterosexism? What is*

sinful or not in any intimate relationship?

Professor Sterling Bjorndahl, biblical scholar, Augustana University College, Camrose, AB

- We're "Transpirant" Four life stories explore the spiritual dimensions of life as a twin-spirited person. How do two spirits live as one? Guests include transgendered and transsexual persons and a Native American berdache.

The following Sunday the Knox-Met United Church newsletter contained several comments on the conference, e.g.:

When Gandhi was asked what he thought of Christianity, he replied: "I have never seen it tried, therefore I am unable to judge." Had Gandhi been present with us at the Conference, he would have had reason to change his mind.

A. Etter

We sometimes talk in our church and in our communities about what God wants for the world. At the Friday evening plenary session of the conference, I experienced a coming together of a group of individuals who are all different from each other (for many reasons, not just sexual

orientation) and yet accepted each other in a way that I have seldom seen. Was there apprehension, fear, and discomfort in the room as well? Maybe, but the overriding feeling for me was that the people in that room were there to risk facing tough issues and to work in community for the purpose of creating a better world. I felt love and compassion at work that evening, and throughout the conference. I cannot believe God wants fear and exclusion and discrimination in our world. **I think we are all created out of God's love and that where love and acceptance are present, so is God.** Last Friday night, I felt that I was in the presence of God.

Lori S.

Alberta's First Transgender Clinic

A new transgender clinic has opened its doors at the Grey Nuns Hospital.

In children transgenderism manifests itself as four or more of the following:

- repeated stated desire to be, or insistence that he or she is the other sex;
- in boys, preference for cross-dressing or simulating female attire; in girls, insistence on

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wearing only stereotypical masculine clothing;

- strong and persistent preferences for cross-sex roles in make-believe play or persistent fantasises of being the other sex;
- intense desire to participate in the stereotypical games and pastimes of the other sex;
- strong preference for play mates of the other sex.

In adolescents or adults, this is manifested by symptoms such as a stated desire to be the other sex, frequently passing as the other sex, desire to live and be treated as the other sex and so on.

For further information and literature please phone 450 - 7119.

EDUCATION

School Librarian Supports Sexual Minority Students

(Condensed from GALE FORCE, April, 1998)

Lower Mainland, B.C. students:

- "As I let the restaurant, these three guys jumped me, got me down and started kicking me with their combat boots. This one guy just kept kicking

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me in the head until everything went black.”

- After the hockey game, this girl came up and started pushing me around. Let me tell you, she was big! She began hitting and kicking me, and then there were three of these girls and they just totally beat me up. I was bleeding from my mouth and everything. It was brutal. After that I was scared to death to even leave my house.”

It's a daily thing, but how can you tell your teachers you're being gay-bashed?" . . . After I came out other gay students started coming out to me instead of talking to the counsellors. We didn't know who to trust among the teachers until one librarian came and talked to us and asked us about which books she could get for the library. We totally clung to her. She helped us set up a group and gave us space to meet in the library."

Clearly sexual-minority kids are looking for empathetic advocates at school, but they say their needs are often misunderstood. Victoria says that when she came out to her school counsellor, he asked her how it felt to be the only

homosexual student in the school. “You tell them something that has taken you so long to come to terms with, and they treat it like it's nothing.”

Little wonder that sexual-minority students drop out at a great rate. They often transfer from one school to the next, trying to find a place to fit in. Some refuse to go to school for weeks at a time, and then have to deal with the anger and frustration of parents and teachers who can't understand why a perfectly capable child is doing so poorly.

“I skipped so much school last year that I failed two out of six courses, and they put me in these boring remedial classes. . . Now I'm getting A's because I'm in a school where the zero tolerance policy is actually enforced.”

YOUTH UNDERSTANDING YOUTH

A Fellowship of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered aged 25 yrs and under

**Meets every Sat., 8-10pm
@ GLCCE
#103, 10612-124 St**

PFLAG/T Edmonton

Agenda for May

2nd - Fringe 2 - “even better the second time round”. Facilitators Sylvia, Marsha, Mark.

9th - “Are you afraid of the dark? A workshop on homophobia with Kristi, Gloria and Lynn

16th - Before Stonewall - The making of a Gay and Lesbian Community. This movie won 2 emmy Awards. Facilitators Marianne, Sylvia

23rd - Pride Dance - Bus Barns, Old Strathcona, 83 Ave & 103 St 8:00pm. Annual Pride awards followed by the dance.

30th - “Picture this” - a game of Pictionary. Barry & YUY member.

JUNE

6th - The Advantages of Being Gay with Dr. Lorne Warneke. Facilitator Blair.

13th - Beautiful Thing - A love story about 2 teenage boys growing up. Facilitators Marianne, Sylvia.

20th - Butch or Femme - who cares? A discussion. Facilitators Blair, Don

27th - Picnic in the Park - Hawrelak Park- 6:00pm Bring your family and friends.

It's A Gay Life!

May/June 1998

A PRAIRIE PARENT'S STORY #3

Terry and Jenny are English and great talkers. This is a family where everyone is free to say what they think. They argue and joke and can be themselves because the bonds between them are strong. They've lived in Alberta since 1973 and love it here. Accepting their son's sexual orientation didn't come easily. Here's their story from Terry's point of view.

(Jenny's story - with comments from their son Jason- will be in the next PFLAG newsletter.)

Terry "Now, the way I felt about homosexuals was I don't hold it against them. I wouldn't want anyone hurt by it, physically that is, but I didn't worry what I said. Jason had heard me call a hockey player 'a big faggot' while we were watching TV. Jason had seen me be like that, heard what I'd said. I'm sure it made it even harder for him.

When we learned that Jason was gay Jenny and I went different ways. Jenny had a

good cry while I was the 'man of the world' type of thing. Women can have a cry but men tend not to show thier feelings as much so what option does that leaave us males?

After a week or two I started looking for someone to blame. How can I put it? It must be someone in *your* family. We weren't very rational to satrt with. We were pointing fingers. 'Must be some in your family because there's no one in mine'. In fact there was no one in either family so that was stupid really on our part but that's the way we were. We couldn't come to grips with it for a while.

We thought about our two girls, Jason's older sisters. They're OK, nothing wrong with them; where did we go wrong with Jason? Jason was always close to Jenny but I can't say he was a 'Mummy's boy'. He worshipped his younger sister. He always followed her round. But she was a real tomboy, always playing hockey and soccer.

When we really thought about it that was another stupid line of thinking.

I didn't think 'How is Jason handling it? I was thinking 'Why me?' and 'What do I do?' We could have lost him. He could have packed his bags and gone somewhere. The way we approached it wasn't the right way.

Jason did it the right way. He hung in there. I wanted to change him, blame someone. I wanted to get in a psychiatrist to change him. Or an expensive hooker - like get it out of him - she'll change his mind. I thought he could change if he went with the right person.

Jenny started to think about AIDS and that sort of thing, gay bashing and so on. I just thought 'I'm not going to go through life with a queer son".

Was the news about Jason's sexual orientation unexpected? "Jason is twenty six now and he was nineteen when we found out. There was an incident when he was

fifteen or sixteen. His Mum was in his bedroom and she found one pin-up of a guy down behind his dresser. It was a guy in jeans, nothing really suggestive. Jenny confronted him with it and Jason denied he was gay. He said he was just curious, type of thing. Jenny asked me what I thought about finding the pin-up and I said 'Jason gay? Never. No chance'. As we saw it we had a normal kid again. It was like a bump in the road".

Jenny "Terry was reassuring and I was happy to take what he said".

Terry "Jason knew from when he was about eight, knew that something was different. He had girlfriends and pin-ups, type of thing. When he went to Amsterdam with the school the kids on the trip had to get permission from their parents to go to the red light district. Over there it's normal, accepted, something to see when you're on a visit. There was nothing to make us suspicious about his orientation at the time but as I think back I can see things that could have made me wonder but I didn't see them as he was growing up. I think I didn't want to know. I just pushed anything that might have made me wonder aside, ignored it.

The way we found out was that Jenny confronted him

when I was out of town. He admitted it. The way she confronted him was not the best way but his reply was right 'I'm still the same person but I'm gay'.

I was out of town for five days when Jenny found out so I had some time to do some thinking. It was like a bad dream. One big joke - but I knew it wasn't. I didn't talk to Jason, I didn't see him face to face. As well as talking to me on the phone Jenny spent a long time talking to a person from PFLAG. She was coming round, life goes on. Jenny was way ahead of me and Jason had talked to her far more than me. It was still hard for him to face. He didn't know if I was going to blow up or not".

Jenny "Terry makes it sound easy but it wasn't".

How did Jason's sisters react? "Now there's another funny story. Jason has two older sisters and he was closest to the younger one. The older one had to lead the way, do everything first. She's a hairdresser and she teaches hairdressing.

Traditionally there are lots of gay males in hairdressing and she'd been around gay males and females as a hairdresser. She'd had students come through who were gay. When she learned about Jason it didn't phase her one little bit. It had no bearing on her life

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at all. Gay males were just part of her life. She accepted it a lot better than all of us really. What the younger sister found hard to accept was that her brother didn't tell her. She was mad at him. She was close to him and he kept this big secret from her all that time while she thought she knew everything about him.

I think the only person who knew before us that Jason was gay was one of his aunties in the UK. He'd confided in her when he was staying with her for a while. She was someone he thought he could be open with. Funnily enough the auntie Jason confided in was a bad choice. She told people and ridiculed him afterwards. It could have ruined him for life. We don't associate with them anymore.

At first we didn't tell anybody but we didn't say 'No, we haven't got a gay son'. If someone asked we'd tell them. Some people would accept it, others wouldn't and not always the ones you'd expect. A cousin's husband had a real bond with Jason. Jason stayed with them when he was working over there and they got on like a house on fire. The cousin put it in a nutshell. It didn't phase him for one second and he admired Jason for all the challenges he'd taken on

career-wise and for being prepared to be out and face the world. That spurred us on a lot. One person being accepting, seeing it that way. It made our lives a lot easier. I started looking at it in a different way. Another relation owns a pub. He said Jason's being gay didn't bother him 'but don't pick up a guy in my pub'!

Once we got a bit used to the idea we started doing things other parents won't. With another English couple with the same complexes as us We went to The Roost (a gay night club). That was different. We saw cross-dressers, out-and-out men, guys kissing guys and going over-board. We knew those things were out there but we'd ignored it. It was equally tough for us. We had to accept that we were not really comfortable with it. I would react the same way if it was a guy and a girl in a straight bar. It wasn't affectionate, it was overboard.

Other aspects of that visit we were quite comfortable with. Kids came up to us as parents. They said things like 'I wish my Dad was like you'''.

Tell me about your experiences with PFLAG. "In PFLAG you hear all sorts of stories about who a child tells first; it can be a brother or

sister, grandparents even. When I meet someone through PFLAG and they ask me 'What do I do?' it's hard to say which is the best way to go, the way that's most comfortable I guess. You can only suggest different approaches.

Girls have asked me 'What do I say to my Dad?' What do I say? Maybe their Dad is different. I say 'Just keep working on it.' Some won't, kids move on. They can be lost to their parents forever. Not all kids in Alberta face the same (difficulties). Rural children have it a lot tougher, and especially the ones from really religious and conservative backgrounds. When I hear the kid's family is in the boonies or they name a conservative religion I know they've got another big hurdle to face. I've sometimes thought 'I wish I could be more religious' but when I see the extreme I think 'Thank God I'm not!'.

Through PFLAG we've given lots of talks. We don't prepare for the talks we give for PFLAG, we just talk so it's natural. Jenny's even been out talking in West Edmonton Mall. Kids come up to us, not just to shake our hands but to give us a hug. They can be open with us. What are their parents missing out on?

One story I'd like to tell. After one speaking session at

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the university an older guy came up to us. I thought he was an older person who'd gone back to university after retiring. I walked with him, we were going the same way. He was sixty-two and he was a professor, not a student. Sixty-two and gay and hadn't told his mother. He had an older brother who was married with children and gay. I'm a phone repairman and here I was basically counselling this university professor. Me, a working class "Limey". We talked. He was there again at the next meeting. I asked had he told his mother and he said "I told her... She knew." At the last meeting at the university I learned that he'd died of AIDS. I'd have liked to have known earlier. The feeling I got about it... well I realized I've come a long way.

Something else, Jason tells the best gay jokes. Hilarious. I'd have told the same jokes before but I'd have been ridiculing them. Now we can tell them back and forth - and Limey jokes - and just laugh. It's not derogatory at all.

PFLAG could get more people coming along now that we've had the Delwin Vriend decision. The court has said we can't discriminate so maybe there are parents who will say to themselves 'Why should we?'. The thing that moved me the most in all

the to and fro of the week after the Supreme court ruling was a photo on the front page of the "Sun". One of the counsellors with his arm around Michael Phair. Brian Mason. I looked at the faces. That was enough for me. I'd like to shake his hand".

GAY MEN'S WEDNESDAY COFFEE EVENINGS

The Gay Men's Wednesday Coffee Evenings group fosters a safe, comfortable environment for all its participants. At the same time, it discourages attendance solely for sexual relations.

Everyone is welcome.

Contact Graham: [REDACTED]

OR just stop by at the
Breadstick Cafe,
10159-82 Ave
any Wednesday Evening
from 7:30pm on...

See you there! (Look
for the rainbow flag on the
table.)

Liatrus Potluck & Perennial, Annual, Houseplant & Seed Exchanges

May 9 - at 6:00pm
Phone: [REDACTED]

May 24 - 2:00pm
Phone: [REDACTED]



ANNUAL PFLAG/T PICNIC

Saturday, May 23, 1998

1:00 pm & on ...

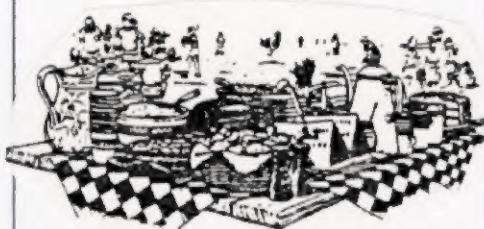
The "Arts Barns" (or North end of the "Bus Barns") on 83 Ave and 103 St. Entrance is on the northwest side

Meet new friends & old!

Hot dogs, pop, concession

If sunny - outdoors

If raining - indoors



Canadian GALA Choruses Festival '98

Festival '98 Multi-Media Extravaganza:

Friday, May 15, 1998

8:00 pm

It's A Gay Life!

Winspear Centre for Music
Featuring EVM performing
Leonard Bernstein's
Chichester Psalms with
soloists, dancers and
visual art.

Festival '98 Concert I

Saturday, May 16, 1998

8:00 pm

Winspear Centre for Music
Performances by Lesbigay
Men's, Women's and Mixed
Choruses from
Western Canada

Festival '98 Concert II

Sunday, May 17, 1998

3:00 pm

Winspear Centre for Music
Performances by Lesbigay
Men's Women's and Mixed
Choruses from Central and
Eastern Canada

FESTIVAL '98 FINALE (free)

Monday, May 18, 1998

12:00 Noon

Edmonton City Hall

Performances by the
combined choruses with
Heather Bishop and
David Sereda